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# LETTER

FROM

GEORGE R. RUSSELL

TO THE MASS MEETING AT PROVIDENCE, R. I.,

SEPT. 10, 1856.

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BOSTON:  
DAMRELL & MOORE,  
16 DEVONSHIRE STREET.

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## LETTER.

JAMAICA PLAIN, Sept. 5, 1856.

WM. M. CHACE, Esq.

Dear Sir — As I cannot be present at the Fremont Mass Meeting, to be held at Providence, on the 10th inst., I take the liberty to answer the invitation you have kindly extended to me, by offering a few remarks applicable to the times.

Never since our political existence has the nation been called upon to decide so momentous an election as the one approaching. The question before us is whether patriotism and honesty shall redeem the national character from the infamy with which it is covered by the profligacy, bad faith, and utter recklessness of the last few years — whether we shall stand forth an example to the world of a free and enlightened people, governed by equal laws and impartial rulers, to whom the oppressed of all lands turn for consolation and hope ; or shall become a scorn to the nations, and our daily history be quoted by despotism, that its subjects may become disgusted at the contrast between our professions and our practice.

The slave oligarchy, which rules us with iron sway, brands the whole country with its infamous character. Every lawless aggression comes back to us. The blood-stained soil of Kansas, the smoking ruins of homes made desolate, the murdered bodies of our brethren insulted even after death, the threatened subjection, uttered by one ruffian on the floor of the Senate Chamber, and carried out by his fellow ruffians of Georgia, South Carolina, and Missouri, the sneaking, cowardly assault on a Free State Senator, plotted, encouraged, and approved by those who would resort to assassination when they cannot refute argument, and who become partakers of the brutal villainy by sanctioning it, the street and bar-room broils, commencing in drunkenness and ending in murder, all emanate from the same source, and all combine to fasten upon the whole land a degradation of which we are joint participators.

We have gradually been brought to a condition which may well alarm those who care for the honor and welfare of the country.

Slavery has become paramount, and all other questions are forgotten or neglected, unless they can be made subservient to the advancement of a grasping and arrogant power, which allows no consideration of justice or good faith to interrupt its unhallowed course. There would seem to be no policy but Southern policy, no interests but Southern interests. Every right of the North is disregarded, and her citizens call in vain for redress. Their just claims are rejected, and their remonstrances answered by derision and insult. The differences of North and South, fostered and encouraged by the National Administration, are growing to fearful magnitude; and if the present one-sided policy of the government is not overthrown at the next election, and slavery confined within prescribed bounds, four years hence will find us in a position that will preclude any amicable adjustment. We have borne and borne until we can bear no longer. The voracity of the slave power is forever crying, "not enough." There is no end to its appetite, and we must be resigned to sink hopelessly beneath its feet, or rise up and crush it under our own. There is no middle course. We must either conquer or be conquered. It is no time now to talk of compromise. We have had too much of that unmeaning word — that sop to Cerberus, to amuse and keep him from barking until further steps can be made towards utter darkness. The day of wheedling compromises has gone by, I trust never to return. They have cheated us too often, and if we ever trust to them again we shall deserve to be the abject slaves our masters are trying to make us. It is in vain to cry "peace, peace, when there is no peace;" to whine about conciliation and concession, and by so doing give ourselves up, bound hand and foot, to a power that knows neither justice nor generosity. The Northern man who talks now of conciliation, is a traitor to the North, and is fitter for the swamps of Carolina than the free soil of New England. Such men are helpers of the iniquity which is bringing shame and ruin on the country, and by their servile sycophancy to the South, they encourage an audacity whose fruits are civil war. They denounce as sectional the only party that advocates freedom, while they themselves acknowledge no country North of the black line of slavery. The gloom which now hangs over the land is the work of Northern men, who are false to their birth-place, false to their former professions and their present convictions, false to their own brethren, and the Christian faith in which they have been nurtured.

It is but little satisfaction that the political graves of these false men have been dug by their own hands. Their public career has

terminated, leaving a moral for the contemplation of future aspirants ; but, though they rest from their labors, they bequeathe a mournful illustration that "the evil that men do, lives after them."

Constitution and Union are preached to us by the South whenever we show any symptoms of restlessness, and we are whipped back to obedience by those who are continually repudiating the one and threatening to break up the other. We have begun to suspect that some monstrous villainy is on foot, whenever the tocsin of disunion is sounded. The doleful death-knell, though so often clanged, still falls alarmingly on the ear, and we look anxiously about us, not for the breaking up, but to see what fraud is coming. If the Union is a scourge to drive us, or an opiate to lull us into forgetfulness of everything manly ; if self-respect, individual rights, national honor, are to be sacrificed ; if we are to be wronged out of everything, and insulted for remonstrating ; if there is nothing left to us but the name of liberty, and we are mere accomplices to an outrageous and fearfully increasing despotism, it is time to weigh the value of a bargain, the advantages of which are all on one side. I know that it is customary at public meetings to fall back on the Union, and its boasted priceless benefits, to smother every cry of indignation by a holy horror of breaking the bonds which connect us with the Slave States. So long as this continues we shall be cheated and insulted, and our desperate attempts at Union-saving will, as usual, be treated with scorn and contempt.

We get well kicked, and we submit with exemplary meekness, being positively assured that the last kick is a "finality;" but before the pain subsides, there comes another and another, and the same assurance with each. A story is told of a Quaker, who, on receiving a blow on his face, turned the other cheek, to which a similar salute was applied. "Friend," says the man of peace, "Scriptural injunction being now satisfied, I will proceed to administer to thee a little wholesome correction." We have turned so often that there is no part of us left untouched, and as we have gained nothing by our humility and forbearance, the Quaker's example is worth remembering.

It has been well said that "the best way to preserve the Union is to make the Union worth preserving." If we direct our efforts to this end we shall be doing faithful service to the Union and to the country. One thing is quite certain. The slaveholders, in their continual threats of disunion, either mean what they say, and desire

that result, or they use the menace as a convenient instrument to bring us back to their interests when they discover signs of bolting, and have no serious intention of separating from us. If they are sober, and really think they shall be better off without us, no deprecation on our part will stop them. We shall only bow and cringe and beg for nothing. If they only mean to frighten us, and have no intention of relinquishing the only thing that keeps life in them, they will be brought to their senses the moment they find that the old trick is discovered, and that disunion has ceased to be a bugbear to the North. There is probably a small minority at the South who sincerely wish to establish a separate empire, where the "peculiar institution" can have unrebuked sway; and the poor, self-deluded, God-forsaken wretches actually persuade themselves that they shall improve by the change.

But the larger part see what disunion would be to them, and have no idea whatever of giving up an alliance that maintains and protects them. They intend that we shall find men and money for the aggressive wars they have in contemplation. They want us to fight their battles, pay their debts, supply them with every article of use or luxury, as we ever have done. They need us to feed them, to clothe them, and to instruct them; to care for their physical wants, and to encourage any unwonted tendencies to the cultivation of intellect. Literature and teachers must come from the North, for who ever hears or reads of a Southern book, or of a Southern scholar, unless here and there a solitary graduate from a Northern college? Their state of semi-civilization has very limited demands for science or art, but to gratify these they must also turn towards the polar star. They look to us to defend them from foreign invasion, and to aid them in the hour of extremity from that more dangerous foe nestling at their door stones, of whom their harrowed souls call up visions filled with the groans of dying men, the shrieks of women and children, and a midnight sky reddened by conflagrations. In fact, they would be a body without head or limbs, a hand without fingers, a helpless, miserable lump of nothingness, and their bitterest enemies could wish them no worse fortune than to try the experiment.

Some one has remarked that the Southern threat of separation is like the town's poor threatening to separate from the town. This is both true and comprehensive. There is nothing, not even a servile insurrection, that would cause such alarm in the slave camp as a

serious disunion movement at the North. It would bring the thinking back to their senses, and we should have conciliation and assurances of friendly feeling, instead of bluster and brutality.

In either case, a familiarity with the once dreaded word *disunion*, a sober, calm consideration of its significance, will be useful. If the South intends to persevere in her reckless course, and make the North entirely subservient to her will; if we are to have every session of Congress occupied only with the designs of the slave power, and the whole thought and authority of the Federal Government are to be concentrated on its extension and perpetuity; in a word, if the Free States are merely tin kettles tied to the tail of the Slave States, it is worth considering whether we had better cut the string and let them run to destruction without us.

The aim of slavery has ever been to obtain the balance of power, to control legislation, and to make the National Government auxiliary to its purpose. But it has, until lately, worked secretly, without avowing its intention. It has now thrown off all disguise, and unblushingly declares that it *will* rule the country. Whether it shall do so rests, as yet, with the Free States. They have let power gradually slide from their hands, and have criminally left the destinies of this great country to Southern bullies and Northern renegades. If the Free States intend to assert their rights, to take the control of the country, as they ought, to keep slavery within allotted limits, to make it entirely sectional, and to separate the government from any participation in it, to declare that the reign of the slave oligarchy is over forever, that the Union shall be a Union for freedom, that the Slave States shall remain in it, and do their duty to it, they will unitedly confirm and sustain the Philadelphia nominations. An entire change of policy can alone save the country. Two platforms are offered to the people, and the respective candidates are pledged to carry them out. One will secure freedom, equality, prosperity, and peace, while the other will assuredly rivet upon us the chains of slavery or the horrors of civil war.

For the first time since we have ranked among the nations of the earth, an election is to take place based solely upon Freedom or Slavery. All minor questions are forgotten, and no difference of opinion exists, save on the great issue which engulfs all others. The mighty antagonisms which have been growing with our growth, until the black shadow of the one threatens to overspread with gloom all that is lovely in the other, are to meet face to face in actual conflict. As they confront each other in hostile array, with banners

whose symbols indicate their respective professions, the distinctive character of each is presented to us. On one side there are civilization, intelligence, cultivation, refinement, and virtue. On the other, barbarism, brutality, ignorance, vice, and crime. We must choose between them.

Respectfully yours,

G. R. RUSSELL.









